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## SHAKESPEARE PSYCHIATRY > >





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PSYCHIATRY ~

a random selection of mind-matters from the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon: with some personal comments

"'Tis the mind that makes the body rich"

-from The Taming of the Shrew

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Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

—from *Macbeth*Act V, Sc. iii

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## AND FIFTY YEARS OF PSYCHIATRY

It seems more true today than ever before that "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." There has probably never been a time when throughout the world there has been such a rapid shifting of the scenery, with the human actors in breathless haste trying to grab a new part and learn new lines. There has been a sudden awakening to the fact that human beings are not merely producers of wealth or adjuncts of a machine, and out of the devastation of this machine age is coming the realization that man and his emotions must eventually control the destinies of man.

I had planned, my friends, another volume dealing with the philosophies suggested by the global war but through the past twelve months I find myself increasingly entranced with the powers of penetration into the human emotions and motivations that the Bard of Avon knew so perfectly as to make him even today ahead of our times.

Since my school days with Shakespeare, many changes have come in the world and many changes have come in me, yet with more than thirty-five years of psychiatry behind me, I read Shakespeare today seeing in him a leading psychiatrist of his time. When I entered medical school two of his quotations seemed exciting, and they are today: "'Tis the mind that makes the body rich", from The Taming of the Shrew, which I have had carved at the entrance of the Research Building at the Institute of Living; and, "Canst thou not minister

to a mind diseased", from Macbeth, to which latter the answer has become "Yes" during these thirty-five years.

I commend to all students of psychiatry and of human emotions Shakespeare—the psychiatrist.

Our times are hard—
And under press',
Which forced this volume
From me in haste!

C. Charles Burlingame

December 25, 1944



Constance: . . . I am not mad: I would to heaven I were!

For then, 'tis like I should forget myself:

O, if I could, what grief I should forget!

Preach some philosophy to make me mad,

And thou shalt be canonized, cardinal;

For, being not mad but sensible of grief,

My reasonable part produces reason

How I may be deliver'd of these woes,

And teaches me to kill or hang myself:

If I were mad, I should forget my son,

Or madly think a babe of couts were he:

I am not mad: too well, too well I feel

The different plague of each calamity.

—from King John Act III, Sc. iv

Constance, a character of great gifts and vivid imagination, is an example of a psychoneurotic, self-centered and dominating, who exhibits mood swings of frustration, as in this scene where she balances between psychosis and self-destruction as a means of escape from herself.



King Richard: . . . How sour sweet music is, When time is broke and no proportion kept! So is it in the music of men's lives.

This music mads me; let it sound no more; For though it have holp madmen to their wits, In me it seems it will make wise men mad.

> —from *Richard II* Act V, Sc. v

Here, as in other of his tragedies, Shakespeare refers to music as a treatment for madness—rediscovered as a modern therapy!



Helena: My mother greets me kindly: is she well? Clown: She is not well; but yet she has her health; she's very merry; but yet she is not well: but thanks be given, she's very well, and wants nothing i' the world; but yet she is not well.

—from All's Well That Ends Well

Act II, Sc. iv

In this scene, the Clown, blithely ignoring the facts, draws us a picture of a psychoneurotic enjoying poor health!



Hamlet: . . . Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. . . .

—from Hamlet

Act III, Sc. i

In the famous soliloquy, Hamlet exhibits the well known mechanism of the indecisive individual who substitutes philosophy for action.





Brutus: . . . Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,

I have not slept.

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.

—from Julius Caesar
Act II, Sc. i

Brutus, trying to bring himself to the act of murdering Caesar, glimpses his own emotional conflicts in this moment of introspection.



Macbeth: Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!

Macbeth does murder sleep," the innocent sleep, Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care, The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath, Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast—

—from *Macbeth*Act II, Sc. ii

In a reaction of fear following the murder of Duncan, Macbeth senses the enormity of his crime —or is actually hallucinating?



Lear: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking
thunder,

Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world! Crack nature's moulds, all germins spill at once That make ingrateful man!

—from King Lear
Act III, Sc. ii

This outcry of Lear's is one of bewilderment and confusion at a world gone awry. Pre-senile, he may have had arteriosclerotic brain changes with flashes of insight into his own condition before he moves with finality into a psychosis.



Ophelia: There's rosemary, that's for remembrance: pray, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

There's fennel for you, and columbines: there's rue for you, and here's some for me: We may call it herb-grace o' Sundays: O you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy: I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died: they say he made a good end—

—from *Hamlet*Act IV, Sc. v

Ophelia, unable to resolve her grief, finds escape in fantasy—a psychotic episode that ends in her self-destruction.





Friar Laurence: . . . For nought so vile that on the earth doth live,

But to the earth some special good doth give;

Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime's by action dignified.
Within the infant rind of this small flower
Poison hath residence, and medicine power:
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part,
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
Two such opposed kings encamp them still
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

—from Romeo and Juliet
Act II, Sc. iii

In this scene, Friar Laurence, the undogmatic sage, the tranquil philosopher, in bringing the sleeping potion to Juliet sums up the conflicts of human emotions which govern action.



Iago: Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens; to which our wills are gardeners: so that, if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce; set hyssop, and weed-up thyme; supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many; either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry; why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. . . .

—from *Othello*Act I, Sc. iii

The sadist, Iago, eulogizes the power of the will as part of his scheme to use Roderigo for his own ends.



Romeo: Courage, man; the hurt cannot be much.

Mercutio: No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide
as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve: ask
for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I
am peppered, I warrant, for this world. A plague o'
both your houses! . . .

—from Romeo and Juliet
Act. III, Sc. i

Mercutio, the brawler, the gay companion, mortally wounded in a bout between the Montagues and the Capulets, shows us the characteristics of the true hypomanic who acts quickly, riding the crest of the wave, even here in his final adieu to the world!



Philip the Bastard: . . . Be great in act as
you have been in thought;
Let not the world see fear and sad distrust
Govern the motion of a kingly eye:
Be stirring as the time; be fire with fire;
Threaten the threatener, and outface the brow
Of bragging horror: so shall inferior eyes,
That borrow their behaviors from the great,
Grow great by your example, and put on
The dauntless spirit of resolution. . . .

—from King John
Act V, Sc. i

Philip is here practicing a form of psychotherapy in teaching the weak and vacillating John how to handle his fears and how to overcome them through affirmative action.



Gaunt: . . . For gnarling sorrow hath less power to bite The man that mocks at it and sets it light.

—from *Richard II*Act I, Sc. iii

Gaunt, himself overcome at the treachery of King Richard, comforts his son, Bolingbroke, who has been sentenced to exile, and shows him a well known escape mechanism from grief.



Portia: The quality of mercy is not strain'd; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd; It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes: 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes The thronèd monarch better than his crown; His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, The attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; But mercy is above this sceptred sway; It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself; And earthly power doth then show likest God's When mercy seasons justice. . . .

—from The Merchant of Venice
Act IV, Sc. i

It is Portia who voices the balanced emotions, the calm philosophy of the out-going mind which enables her to play upon the emotions of the court so as to prepare a judicial escape!



Othello: . . . I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one who loved not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their mèdicinal gum. . . .

—from *Othello*Act V, Sc. ii

Othello, standing over the body of the innocent Desdemona whom he has murdered in a frenzy of jealousy, realizes at last the perfidy of Iago. In a panic state, or a reactive depression, the Moor dies by his own hand.



Macbeth: . . . Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

—from *Macbeth*Act V, Sc. v

His hands red with the blood of the murdered, his wife insane with guilt, Macbeth—"fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf"—sinks into a pronounced reactive depression.



Flavius: Hence! home, you idle creatures, get you home!

Is this a holiday? What, know you not,
Being mechanical, you ought not walk

Upon a labouring day without the sign

Of your profession? . . .

—from *Julius Caesar* Act I, Sc. i

Flavius and Marullus, politicians of ancient Rome, demonstrate an ancient method of ending a "walkout"—forcing "mob psychology" to yield to the habit of obedience.

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